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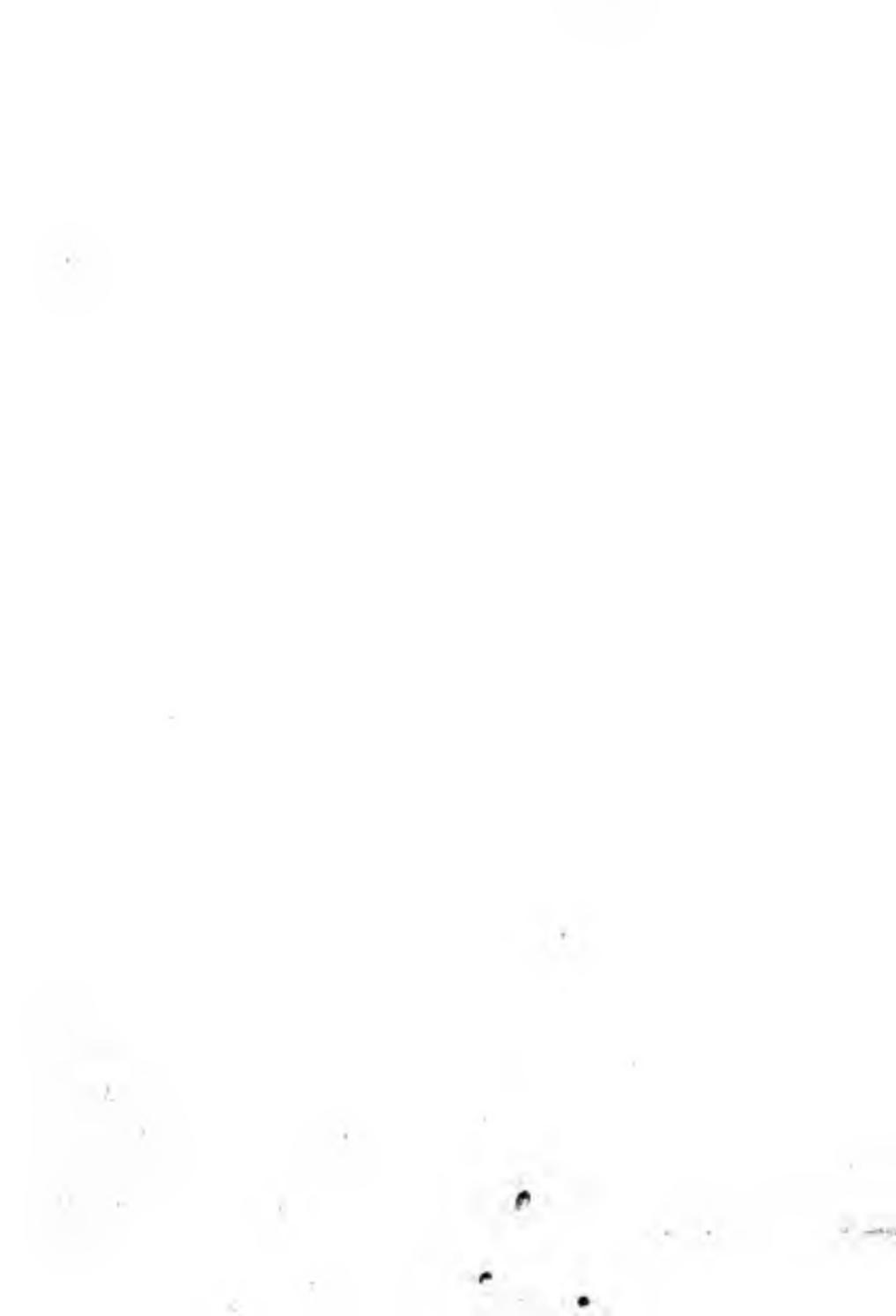
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The Wisdom of the East Series

Vol. 40

EDITED BY

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Dr. S. A. KAPADIA

A FEAST OF LANTERNS

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INDIA.



WISDOM OF THE EAST

A FEAST OF LANTERNS

RENDERED WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY L. CRANMER-BYNG

AUTHOR OF "A LUTE OF JADE," "THE ODES OF CONFUCIUS," ETC.

As our gardens have already been indebted to China for a few
choice flowers, who knows but our poetry may some day lie under a
similar obligation?

SIR JOHN DAVIS, *The Poetry of the Chinese*, 1829.



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TO

MANY FRIENDS IN CALIFORNIA

"Oh that I could grasp this golden light of Spring, keep
it and horde it—a treasure-trove of days—for my fairest
far-off friends."—Li Po.



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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

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A FEAST OF LANTERNS

INTRODUCTION

IN Spring, "for sheer delight," sang Yuan Mei, "I set the lanterns swinging through the trees." This was no formal Feast of Lanterns held in the first month of the year, but his own private affair, the lonely ritual of a spring-worshipper and garden anchorite.

Perhaps those who loved him—and they were many—wandered his pleached alleys and maple groves and admired the lanterns with their red dragons that leaped and plunged in gold and silver seas; but I like to think that the guests were gone in long procession of gleaming boats when the old rose-master looked on his garden and found it whiter and fairer than the far-off moon. At once you guess the whole charm and weakness of Chinese poetry. Here is the narrow moon-garden of its range, its myriad dragons shoaling through unreal seas, its peonies with the souls of mandarins and chrysanthemums with the shadows of children. Yet this sense of limitation and unreality belongs only to the surface; within

this little space lies a vast world opened to us through symbols.

Moon

The moon hangs low over the old continent of Chinese poetry. Chang O, Moon-goddess, is the beautiful pale watcher of the human drama, and all that she has known of secret things, of passion and pleasure, swift ruin and slow decay, she records in music. Through her great palaces of cold drift the broken melodies of unrecorded lives. She is the Goddess alike of sorrow and love —of Po Chü-i who in exile hears only the lurking cuckoo's blood-stained note, the gibbon's mournful wail, and Chang Jo Hu who rides triumphant on a moonbeam into the darkened chamber of his lady's sleep. Her rays are more persistent than water; you may draw the curtains and think you have shut out night with all its whispering of leaves, but a tiny crevice will let her in.

Best of all the poets loved her when she lingered above the broken courts and roofless halls of vanished kings.

Time and nemesis wrote large upon their walls, but moonlight brought them a glamour unknown to history, and cast a silver mantle lightly upon their dust. They were what Tu Fu and Meng Hao Jan willed—bright shadows in the rose alleys of romance; Gods of War and builders of their

dreams in stone. At least one singer prayed the Moon that his passionate heart might haunt the ruins of Chang-An, a nightingale. All sacred intimacies and desires that dare not clothe themselves in words have her confidence, and because she is goddess as well as woman she will never betray them. She links together the thoughts of lovers separated by a hundred hills and the lonely places of despair are steeped in her kindness. On the fifteenth of the eighth month she graciously descends from her "domain, vast, cold, pure, unsubstantial," and grants the desires of all who await her coming.

Lastly, she is the link between the present and the past, binding us in the solemn hours to the men or women who have lived and wrought beneath her spell. One Chinese poet, remembering in moonlight the lovers of long ago, prayed that lovers yet to come might also remember him. Two hundred years had flown, and after a night of splendour some woodman passing at dawn found a double lotus on a broken tomb. And Kyuso Muro, the Japanese philosopher, has written: "It is the moon which lights generation after generation, and now shines in the sky. So may we call it the Memento of the Generations. As we look upon it, and think of the things of old, we seem to see the reflections of the forms and faces of the past. Though the moon says not a word, yet it speaks. If we have forgotten them it

recalls the ages gone by. . . . The present is the past to the future, and in that age some one like me will grieve as he looks upon the moon."

FLOWERS

In the time of the T'ang dynasty there lived a retired scholar whose name was Hsuan-wei. He never married, but dwelt alone, yet his companions were books and flowers, his little friends. If he had any enemies, they were frost and wind and blight and mildew. Three seasons brought him joy and one sorrow. Love to him meant the gentle opening of rose-petals, and death their fall. The neighbours never troubled about him, for how could there be scandal between a man and flowers? No woman ever plundered his garden and desecrated his Temple of Abiding Peace. In fine, he was the happiest man that ever lived.

Then something came to pass. It was "blue night," and the garden never looked whiter underneath the moon. And every tree melted into the spirit of a tree peering between its luminous leaves. The Wu t'ung whispered to the maple, and the maple passed the story round to the mountain pine of the phœnix that augustly condescended to rest in its branches some long-forgotten spring. Only the old willow stood apart and said nothing, for the willow is a wizard,

and the older he gets the more crabbed and silent he becomes.

The owner of the garden stood spell-bound in the moonlight. Suddenly a blue shadow flitted shyly from among the flowers and a lady in a long robe of palest blue came towards him and bowed: "I live not far from here," said she, "and in passing to visit my August Aunt I felt a longing to rest in your beautiful garden."

The wondering philosopher stammered his consent, and instantly a band of pretty girls appeared, some carrying flowers and some willow boughs. According to etiquette an introduction became necessary.

Then a girl in green announced herself: "I am called Aspen," and, pointing to a girl in white, "her name is Plum," to one in purple, "she is called Peach," and so she went on till the last, a little maid in crimson who was called Pomegranate. The Lady Wind, who, she explained, was their maternal Aunt eighteen times removed, had promised them a visit which for some reason she had delayed. As to-night's moon was unusually bright, they had decided to visit her instead. Just at that instant the Lady Wind was announced, and, with a great fluttering of many-coloured silks, the girls trooped out to greet her and one and all implored her to stay with them in the garden. Meanwhile, Mr. Hsuan-wei had discreetly retired into the shadow. But

when the August Aunt asked who the owner was he stepped boldly into the moonlight and saw a lady of surpassing grace with a certain gauzy floating appearance like gossamer. But her words chilled him, for they were like the cold breath stirring the leaves of a black forest, and so he shivered. However, with the true politeness of a Chinese host, he invited her into his contemptible Pavilion of Abiding Peace, where he was astonished to find a magnificent banquet already prepared.

So they feasted and sang, and I am sorry to say that many cups went round, and the Lady Wind became both critical and extravagant. She condemned two unfortunate singers to pay forfeit by drinking a full goblet a-piece, but her hands shook so as she held the goblets out that they slipped from her grasp and fell with a crash to the floor. And much wine was spilled over poor little Pomegranate, who had appeared for the first time in her new embroidered crimson robe. Pomegranate, being a girl of spirit, was naturally annoyed, and, telling her sisters they could court their Aunt themselves, she blushed herself off.

The Lady Wind, in a great rage, cried out that she had been insulted, and, though they all tried to calm her, she gathered her robe about her and out of the door she flew off hissing to the east. Then all the girls came before their flower philo-

sopher and bowed and swayed sorrowfully and said farewell, and, floating through the portals, vanished into the white parterres around ; and when Mr. Hsuan-wei looked, lo, the Temple of Abiding Peace was empty as all temples of its kind should be. And he sat down to wonder if it was a dream. For every trace of the feast was gone and yet a faint subtle fragrance lingered as though some gracious and flowerlike presence had been once a guest.

Next night, when strolling in his garden, he was suddenly encircled by his little friends. They were all busy discussing the conduct of Pomegranate and urging her to apologise to the August Aunt eighteen times removed. It was evident that they went in fear of her since last night's unfortunate revel. But little red Pomegranate would have no truck with Aunt Wind, who had spoilt her nice new robe. "Here is one who will protect us from any harm," she cried, pointing to the surrounded form of Mr. Hsuan-wei. So they told him how each year they were injured by spiteful gales and how Aunt Wind had to some extent protected them.

Mr. Hsuan-wei was sorely puzzled : "How can this contemptible one afford protection ?" he asked. Pomegranate explained. It was such a very little thing required of him—just to prepare a crimson flag embroidered with sun, moon, and stars in gold and hoist it east of the garden at

dawn on the first morning of each new year, then all hurricanes would pass them by. Accordingly, he promised, and the next day saw him stitching golden stars on a crimson background. And he rose early, an hour before the dawn on the appointed day and set his flag duly towards the east in the breath of a light east wind. Suddenly a great storm gathered and broke. The world rocked. The air was dark with flying stones and whirling dust. The giants of the forest cracked, others were overwhelmed. But in Mr. Hsuan's garden there was a deep calm. Not a flower stirred. Then in a flash he understood. His little friends whom he had saved from destruction were the souls of his little flowers. That night, when the moon was midway, they came to him with garlands of peach and plum blossom whose taste conferred the beauty of everlasting youth. Mr. Hsuan-wei partook of the petals and straightway the lingering drift of old sorrows from the days of his ignorance melted like snow from his heart. And with it went all the pathetic rubbish that even a flower philosopher allows to accumulate. He became young and divinely empty, yet in his soul pulsed the *élan vital* of Mr. Henri Bergson. "Soon afterwards," says the ancient chronicle, "he attained to a knowledge of the True Way, and shared the immortality of the Genii."¹

¹ The full story will be found in F. H. Balfour's *Leaves from my Chinese Scrap-book*.

This story is typical of many. In the west it would be passed by as a pretty if rather naïve and simple fairy-tale. Yet behind all Chinese poetry and folk-lore, underlying all art, is the ancient philosophy of the True Way. And this is the Way of Happiness according to Liu An : " Most men are vexed and miserable because they do not use their hearts in the enjoyment of outward things, but use outward things as a means of delighting their hearts." To enjoy is to have the affinity to understand, the persistence to enter, and finally the power to reproduce. All that we love we reproduce, and so it is with flowers, the best beloved of Mr. Hsuan-wei. It is that delicate sense of touch between life and life, between soul and soul, that alone enables the artist to give—not the imitation of a living flower, but the flower itself, reborn within him, and therefore his own child. And what was this immortality the Genii bequeathed to Hsuan-wei except the sense of eternal youth that comes when kinship and affinity with the little bright children of nature is established ? And so the philosopher has joined the immortals, and lives in the sister realms of poetry and fairy lore, and every garden-lover sees him walking by moonlight surrounded by his fairy flowers. Outside, Aunt Wind, that shrill hater of all things beautiful, betrayer of woodland secrets, beats vainly at the magic barrier, a little crimson flag.

DRAGONS

The Dragon is one of the four spiritually endowed creatures of China, the others being the Unicorn, the Phoenix, and the Tortoise. There are four principal Lung, or Dragons: the celestial Dragon, which supports and guards the mansions of the gods; the Spiritual Dragon, which causes the winds to blow and the rains to fall; the Earth Dragon, which marks out the courses of rivers and streams; and the Dragon of the Hidden Treasure, which watches over wealth concealed from mortals. Here, however, we are chiefly concerned with the significance of the Dragon in connection with Chinese art and literature. From earliest times it has been associated in the Chinese mind with the element of water. Most of the great philosophers have used this element by way of illustration, but Liu An, the mystical Prince of Huai-nan, has epitomised all that his countrymen ever felt or expressed on the subject:

"There is nothing in the world so weak as water; yet its experience is such that it has no bounds, its depth such that it cannot be fathomed. In length it is without limit, in distance it has no shores; in its flows and ebbs, its increase and decrease, it is measureless. When it rises to Heaven, it produces rain and dew; when it falls upon the earth, it gives richness and moisture; there is no creature in the world to whom it does

not impart life, and nothing that it does not bring to completion.

"It holds all things in its wide embrace with perfect impartiality, its graciousness extends even to creeping things and tiny insects, without any expectation of reward. Its wealth is sufficient to supply the wants of the whole world, without fear of exhaustion ; its virtue is bestowed upon the people at large, and yet there is no waste. Its flow is ever onward—ceaseless and unlimited ; its subtlety such that it cannot be grasped in the hand. Strike it—you hurt it not ; stab it—you cause no wound ; cut it—you cannot sever it in twain ; apply fire to it—it will not burn. Whether it runs deep or shallow, seen or unseen, taking different directions—flowing this way and that, without order or design—it can never be utterly dispersed. Its cutting power is such that it will work its way through stone and metal ; its strength so great that the whole world is succoured by it. It floats lazily through the regions of formlessness, soaring and fluttering above the realms of obscurity ; it worms its way backwards and forwards among valleys and watercourses, it seethes and overflows its bank in vast and desert wilds. Whether there be a superfluity of it, or a scarcity, the world is supplied according to its requirements for receiving and for imparting moisture to created things, without respect to precedence in time. Wherefore there is nothing

either generous or mean about it, for it flows and rushes with echoing reverberations throughout the vast expanse of Earth and Heaven."

If you close your eyes after reading this passage, you will see in a vision the flight of the Chinese Dragon, soaring and fluttering above the realms of obscurity. He is greater than Leviathan, "that crooked serpent," the storm dragon, greater than Tannin, dragon of the streaming rain, greater than Rahab, devourer of the westering sun, or Babylonian Tiamat, also the dragon deep. For these are the rude imaginings of early religionists, and no more resemble him than primitive scratchings on rock or bone resemble the vast brood of Sekko, who "in olden time fancied dragons, painted them, and spent days and nights in loving them." The former stand for chaos and rebellion, but the Chinese Lung is the ascending one, rising to power through adaptability to change, recoiling upon himself only to produce new forms.

"The dragon," says Kuan Tzu, "becomes at will reduced to the size of a silkworm or swollen till it fills the space of heaven and earth. It desires to mount, and it rises until it affronts the clouds; to sink, and it descends until hidden below the fountains of the deep." And so, from a symbol of spiritual power from whom no secrets are hidden, this dragon becomes a symbol of the human soul in its divine adventure, "climbing

aloft on spiral gusts of wind; passing over hills and streams, treading in the air, and soaring higher than the Kwan-lun Mountains, bursting open the Gate of Heaven, and entering the Palace of God."

The symbol suggests, and all Chinese poetry is the poetry of suggestion. A poem is not merely inspired, but inspiring. It implies collaboration between the poet and his audience.

Poetry, according to a Chinese commentator, is designed to raise the reader to a plane of mental ecstasy known to the Buddhists as *samadhi*. No great poem finishes when the last line is brought to a close. The poet has merely propounded a theme which the reader continues ; "each stanza is but the unclosing of a door whose last swings out upon the eternal quest. Through the glimpse vouchsafed to us we ourselves become visionaries." In most early Chinese poems the influence of Taoism, the nature philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, is felt. With a philosophy based upon the words of Chuang Tzu, "The true sage, taking his stand upon the beauty of the universe, pierces the principle of things," it is small wonder that the broad stream of speculative thought found its final outlet in Chinese art and poetry.

Its three most precious jewels were Weakness, Emptiness, and Humility, and their earthly counterparts Water, Space, and Flowers. To have the attributes of these three was to become

a Taoist. Artists and poets were the anchorites of Tao, and the secret places of nature their shrines. The savage transports of Alexandrian fanatics, the sensual raptures of later mysticism, and the torture lusts of Indian fakirs never shook them from their indomitable calm. The winds brought them romance from "a hundred moonlit miles," or sped them adventuring on strange waters. For music they had the waterfall and the twilight orchestras of birds preluding the dramas of dawn or shadow plays of night.

The souls of these ancient Rishis and Arhats were caravanserais of cheer for men, and their minds still waters reflecting the brief moonlight, the passing cloud, and the blossom ere it fell. Yet I should be the last to convey the idea that all Chinese poets and artists were anchorites. In the third century A.D. one of the earliest literary coteries known to history—The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove—found a common inspiration in wine. Wang Chi, of the seventh century, was known as the Five Bottle Scholar. Li Po, and his contemporary Tu Fu, were both hard drinkers. Moreover, many of China's greatest poets were also her greatest statesmen. This is especially true of the Tang dynasties which produced Wang Chien, Han Yü, and Po Chü-i, and the Sung, which includes Wang An-shih, the great social reformer and poet, Su Tung-p'o, and, to a lesser degree, others innumerable.

Such a combination would be almost impossible in the West, and it is difficult to recall any name that is associated imperishably with both. Yet the following passage from the writings of Chuang Tzu will show clearly how the men of ancient China attained their dual citizenship and achieved greatness in two worlds through the doctrine of the guarded life :

“ Outwardly you may adapt yourself, but inwardly you must keep to your own standard. In this there are two points to be guarded against. You must not let the outward adaptation penetrate within, nor the inward standard manifest itself without. In the former case you will fall, you will be obliterated, you will collapse, you will lie prostrate. In the latter case you will be a sound, a name, a bogie, an uncanny thing.”

And of those who carried out these precepts he says :

“ They seemed to be of the world around them, while proudly treading beyond its limits . . . they saw in penal laws a trunk, in social ceremonies wings, in wisdom a useful accessory ; in morality a guide. For them penal laws meant a merciful administration ; social ceremonies, a passport through the world ; wisdom, an excuse for doing what they could not help ; and morality, walking like others upon the path.”

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

"Once upon a time the Emperor Yuen Tsung, of the T'ang dynasty, had imperial ink called Dragon Fragrance. One day he saw in the ink little Taoist priests like flies walking about. They called out to him—'O King! live for ever! Your servants are the spiritual essence of the ink, the ambassadors of the black pine. Whoever in this world has literary powers must have twelve of us dragon guests in his ink.'"

This is the story of the ink taken from an ancient collection called T'an Ching. Even materials of a genius must be touched with magic and informed with life.

All Chinese reverence flowed into ancestor-worship on the one hand, or into art and poetry on the other. In their religious emotions the Chinese look backward as well as forward. For, as Dr. Hubbard has pointed out in his *Fate of Empires*, "The Chinaman, through the long Chain of those, his own proximate creators, who have gone before him, worships the ultimate Creator." And something of this ancestor-worship creeps also into his creative art.

"He is haunted," as I have written of Tu Fu, in a previous book, "by the vast shadow of a past without historians—a past that is legendary, unmapped, and unbounded. . . . He is haunted by the traditional voices of the old masters of his

craft, and lastly, more than all by the dead women and men of his race, the ancestors that count in the making of his composite soul and have their silent say in every action, thought, and impulse of his life."

If you would dive into the well-springs of Chinese poetry you must go deep into its legends and folk-lore. Many of their greatest poems have broadened out from a tiny source. The following, which is after all but a wreath of mist, a puff of wind, and a sprinkle of rain, has nevertheless been a constant inspiration :

"In times of old Prince Wai, who had visited the mountains Kao T'ang, fell into a tired sleep. In his dreams a lovely girl came gliding down and addressed him: 'I am the lady of the Witches' Mountain, a wanderer of Kao T'ang. Hearing that you, my lord, have visited this spot, I fain would spread for you the mat and pillow ! ' "

The prince shared his couch with the fairy, who afterwards, as she bade farewell to her royal lover, faded singing :

My home is on the sunlit side of the Witches' Mountain,
And I dwell on the peaks of Kao T'ang.
At dawn I marshal the morning clouds,
And at night I summon the rain,
Every morn and every night, at the Bright Tower's foot.

Modern criticism has charged many of the great poets, especially of the T'ang dynasty, with being

plagiarists. Perhaps we shall never know how much the poets of a less chronicled age were indebted to the legends and ballads of the nameless meister-singers of a still simpler past, who sang, not for fame, nor even the remembrance of bright hours, but only because their hearts were full of song. But we know that the poetry of the T'ang dynasty contains countless allusions to ancient legend, and Li Po did not hesitate to take some old theme, worn by time and transmission to an echo that lingered in obscure valleys, and sing it clearly to his own gracious music ; so that the old ballad became a modern lyric, or rather revived anew like "the Spring's eternal story, that was old and is young again." He takes, for example, the little four-line poem sung by the peasants of Korea in the rice-fields, and called "Leading with the Guitar." The story is very simple : In Korea, a ferryman once got up early and fastened his boat to a bamboo-pole on the bank. An old man with crazy brain, and hair floating in the wind, appeared. He carried a bowl in his hand, and, stepping into the stream, would pass over. His wife followed to draw him back. She could not reach him. He fell in and was drowned. His wife took a guitar and beat the strings, singing as she did so : "Aged man ! there is nothing by which you can cross the stream." Her singing was very sad, and when it was done she also threw herself into

the river, and died. The ferryman went home and told his wife, Lin Yu. Lin Yu was much affected, and made a poem to accompany the guitar. This was the sixteen-character poem for four lines that they still sing in Korea to the present day.

Li Po took the dry bones of this bare little narrative, and tragedy looks out of the eyes and calls with the voice of the wife: "Old man, there is no way to cross the river. If you venture you may take hold of a tiger, but the river is hard to trust to. The aged man fell in, he died in the river, and floated down the stream. Out upon the sea are great whales; their white teeth are like the snowy mountains. Aged sir! aged sir! will you hang there upon those mountains?" Suddenly the hard and brilliant notes of the song become silent. Grief for the husband is merged into pity for the wife, then the merest cadence follows, with its one eventful line: "That guitar has a sorrowful tone, and there is no returning."

History and legend are more often than not interwoven. An Emperor like Ming Huang of the T'ang dynasty, whose splendour and sorrowful romance still glow in the poems of Tu Fu, Li Po, and Po Chü-i, is immortal. He has but to step over the borders of his empire into hero-land. He sails with his imperishable consort in the black-winged junk seamed with stars on a far quest to the Fortunate Isles. And lonely fishermen drift-

ing through the sea-mist have brushed with their keels the shores of P'eng Lai, Island of the Blest, and heard the tones of a lute of jade and the voice of His celestial Majesty singing to the lady Yang Kwei-fei Li Po's Song of the Scented Balcony. The cup of poison given to Liu An by history became the elixir of immortality in legend, and straightway he soared to heaven in broad day, followed by a miscellany of dogs and poultry on whom the cup and its dregs had descended. It is even possible for a name to pass utterly from record of the historians and yet live through tradition. And the poets of China have conferred many a cup of immortality on some faint celestial shadow or fading hill-side ghost.

CHINESE VERSE FORM

In a previous book, *A Lute of Jade*, I have referred to the structure of Chinese verse. It is necessary to remember that the Chinese language is made up mostly of monosyllabic words expressing root-ideas. There are also a sufficient number of diphthongs to give variety. As Sir John Davis points out in his *Poetry of the Chinese*, such words as *seen* and *leen* correspond nearly to the English *lion* and *fluid*. Chinese is essentially a language in which vowel-sounds prevail and the few consonants are far from being harsh. In the literary language, used by all the great poets,

the only terminal consonant is *n*, as in *Ch'un*, and its nasal *ng*, as in *Hong*. The only harsh initial is *Ts*, as in *Tsin* and *Tsz*. There are only about four hundred different sounds in Chinese, and, in order to discriminate between words of similar sound, resort has to be made to tones which are akin to musical notes. Of these tones only two count in the making of Chinese poetry, namely, the *Ping*, or even tone, and *Tsze*, or accentuated, with its three modifications known as *Shang-sheng*, the rising note, *Khu-sheng*, the entering note, and *Ruh-sheng*, the sinking note. These tones, as Mr. Charles Budd points out¹ in his interesting essay on the Technique of Chinese Poetry, "are used to make rhythm as well as to express meaning." Rhymes occur in the even lines of a poem. In five-syllable verses there is a caesura which comes after the second syllable, and in poems of seven syllables after the fourth.

Another form of Chinese verse construction is that of parallel lines. This particular form is well known to us in Hebrew poetry, especially the Psalms. It does not follow that each word and line should answer its fellow, but there must be "a marked correspondence and equality in the construction of the lines—such as noun answering to noun, verb to verb," etc.

The following is an example quoted by Sir

¹ *Chinese Poems*, translated by Charles Budd, Henry Frowde & Co.

John Davis in his essay on the Poetry of the Chinese :

A hundred—a thousand, ten thousand projects are hard to accomplish ;
 Five times—six times—ten years very soon arrive.
 When you have found a day to be idle—be idle for a day ;
 When you have met with three cups to drink—then drink your three cups.

Chinese poems generally consist of four, eight, twelve, or sixteen lines. There are, indeed, longer poems, but the whole idea of a Chinese poet is to condense and suggest. Professor Giles says : "There is no such a thing as an epic in the language." As regards metre, the four-character line is chiefly confined to the ancient collection of national ballads made by Confucius and known as *The Book of Odes*. The usual metres of the great poets of the T'ang dynasty were five and seven-character lines. These are called *Shih*, or regular poems. The six or eight-character line is only to be met with alternated with others in poems of irregular metre.

EPOCHS IN CHINESE POETRY

Great dynasties in China made for great art and literature largely under the influence of a national awakening. Expeditions and embassies to distant lands brought back new ideas ; and, above

all, the fusion of two widely different types of mind, the Northern or Confucian type and the Southern or Taoist, prevented thought from becoming too formalised and gave a new impetus to creative imagination. Small kingdoms meant perpetual warfare and militarism; hence few names famous in literature will be found in the annals of dynasties like the Ch'i and early Sung.

The poetical metres of each age vary according to the requirements of the period. In the beginning we find the short metre of the Odes well adapted to the needs of a simpler civilisation. Gradually, as society becomes more complex, the verse needs grow until finally the five and seven-character line of the T'ang dynasty appears, and after that the form has become stereotyped. The great Sung poets continued the T'ang tradition, but added little to it, and after them only a few flashes of original genius illumine here and there a dark horizon.

The oldest period of all, that of the Odes, has a range of nearly 1,200 years, from 1765 to 585 B.C.

Towards the close of the Chou dynasty, in the fourth century B.C., Ch'u Yuan wrote his celebrated *Li Sao*, or "Falling into Error." He may be called the father of the Chinese nature poets.

The Han dynasty, B.C. 206 to A.D. 221, contains very little poetry of the first rank.

T'ao Ch'ien belongs to the eastern Tsin dynasty, which lasted about one hundred years, from 317

to 419 A.D. This author has been comparatively neglected as yet by Western scholars. Many of his poems would be well worth translating.

The T'ang dynasty, 618 to 905 A.D., is the golden age of Chinese poetry. Most of the famous poets belonged to this period. Li Po, Tu Fu, Po Chü-i, Han Yu, are only a few names mentioned at random.

From 907 to 960 A.D. came the period of the Five Dynasties, with no great name outstanding.

The Sung dynasty, from 960 to 1206 A.D., ranks after the T'ang as the second greatest epoch in Chinese literature. The most celebrated poets of this age were Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Tung-p'o.

The Mongol, or Yuan dynasty, lasted from 1206 to 1368 A.D., and produced one great poet, Liu Chi.

During the Ming dynasty, A.D. 1368-1644, novel-writing was greatly in vogue, but there is nothing in the poetry of this period that would challenge comparison with the masterpieces of an earlier date.

The Manchu dynasty, which began in A.D. 1644 and only recently ended, contains the names of Yuan Mei and Chiu Tsy-Yung, whose Cantonese *Love Songs*, translated by Mr. Cecil Clementi, are fast becoming a classic.

CONCLUSION

The great storehouse of Chinese poetry is still untouched. Forty-eight thousand nine hundred

are the collected poems of the T'ang dynasty alone, and of these possibly some three or four hundred have been translated into various European languages.

As the Chinese have more than 40,000 ideographs, and a good Chinese scholar is one who can commit to memory about eight or nine thousand, the difficulties in the way of translation are obvious. Nor is it easy to find one who is both a profound linguist and a poet as well. One who is so deeply indebted as I am to the researches of the great sinologues of the nineteenth century is conscious of treading on delicate ground even in referring to the relations between scholarship and literature. The fact, however, remains, that with a few rare exceptions, the scholar has attempted too much. Poetry is poetry, whether it be written in Chinese ideographs or European characters, and no knowledge of Chinese will enable one to interpret the poet's message in another tongue. There is an Italian proverb which says that to translate is to traduce, and this is profoundly true of ninety-nine translations out of a hundred. Before one line is placed on paper the translator from the Chinese must have soaked himself in the traditions of the Chinese masters, their reticence, their power of suggestion, their wonderful colour-sense, and, above all, their affinity and identification with their subject. He might well study the methods of the Chinese painters, who

never put brush to canvas before committing all essential details to memory. He might read the story of Wu Tao-tzu, the greatest of all Chinese masters, as told by Mr. Laurence Binyon in *The Flight of the Dragon*: "He was sent by the Emperor to paint the scenery of a certain river. On his return, to every one's surprise, he had no sketches to show. 'I have it all,' he said, 'in my heart.'"

The poems I have chosen to render belong chiefly to the school of landscape. This does not mean that Chinese poets avoided the grim realities of life and the ceaseless struggle for existence. Poets as far apart as Chu Yuan in the fourth century B.C. and Li Hua in the ninth century A.D. have given us battle pictures which have seldom been equalled. Both these mighty panoramas deal with the pomp and panoply of armed hosts, the shock of battle in the bleak plains of Tartary, and finally moonlight upon the quiet faces of the innumerable dead. In the time of the T'angs universal conscription obtained. Tu Fu, in his famous poem "The Recruiter," gives a wonderful description of the deserted countryside from which all the menfolk had gone. Many soldiers were also poets, famous generals like Yo Fei, more often than not commanders of small military posts on the lonely caravan routes in Chinese Turkistan.

Yet, after all, the deepest feeling of the Chinese

poets is revealed in their word-painting of woods and mountains and water. Kuo Hsi, the great artist of the Sung dynasty, in his essay on painting, says :

“ Mountains make water their blood ; grass and trees their hair, mist and cloud their divine colouring. Water makes of mountains its face, of houses and fences its eyebrows and its eyes, and of fishermen its soul.”

And again of water he writes :

“ Water is a living thing, hence its form is deep and quiet, or soft and smooth, or broad and ocean-like or thick like flesh, or circling like wings, or jetting and slender, rapid and violent like an arrow, rich as a fountain upon the sky or running down into the earth where fishermen lie at ease. Grass and trees on the river banks look joyous, and are like beautiful ladies under veils of mists and cloud, or sometimes bright and gleaming as the sun shines down the valley. Such are the living aspects of water.”¹

The fishermen who become the soul of water are sages like Chang Chih Ho, and poets like Ou-Yang Hsiu of the solemn autumn dirge and moonlight threnody. In the picture of the latter exhibited a few years back at the British Museum the face of the poet is fixed and calm. His eyes have taken in all beauty and externals, and his gaze

¹ *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, by Ernest Fenollosa, vol. ii. pp. 14 and 15.

has swept beyond them into the beauty beyond all vision.

One with the movement of the boat, one with the mood of the glimmering waters and the surrender of the scented woods, he grasps ten thousand and secures One. Such were the Taoist fishermen of Kuo Hsi. Drifting with the winds and the currents of great rivers, adventuring by unknown streams, they attained Harmony, and their spoils are bright moments of the eternal Mood caught in golden nets, flower fairies held in gossamer. Never has the earth been so worshipped by man. She was at once the unattainable mistress and goddess surrendering to mortal lover. And never a bell of solitary convent floated across the Chinese landscape but it brought some anchorite of ancient beauty to her shrine.

When the sound of a bell is withdrawn till it fails in the green
mists of twilight,
Night and the dreamer pursuing his dream return through a
myriad leaves.

LINES FROM THE TOMB OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN

TAKEN from a tomb on the Fu-Kiu mountain district of So-Chau in the Province of Kiangsu. The date of the poem is many centuries old.

Mother of Pity, hear my prayer
That in the endless round of birth
No more may break my heart on earth,
Nor by the windless waters of the Blest
Weary of rest ;
That drifting, drifting, I abide not anywhere.
Yet if by Karma's law I must
Resume this mantle of the dust
Grant me, I pray,
One dewdrop from thy willow spray,
And in the double lotus keep
My hidden heart asleep.

A WORD FROM THE WIND

FROM an ancient Chinese Ballad of the fourth century A.D.

There is some one of whom I keep a-thinking ;
There is some one whom I visit in my dreams,
Though a hundred hills stand sentinel between us,
And the dark rage of a hundred sunless streams.
For the same bright moon is kind to us,
And the same untrammelled wind to us,
Daring a hundred hills,
Whispers the word that thrills.
And the dust of my heart, laid bare,
Shows the lilies that linger there.

WANG PO

A.D. 648-676

ONE of the earliest of the T'ang poets. He was famous for his power of improvising, and seldom required to re-write a single line. His career, begun at the precocious age of six, was cut short by drowning when he was only twenty-nine. During this brief period, however, his influence was very great, and many students came to him for instruction in philosophy and literature.

A KING OF TANG

There looms a lordly pleasure-tower o'er yon dim shore,
Raised by some King of Tang.
Jade pendants at his girdle clashed, and golden bells
Around his chariot rang.

Strange guests through sounding halls at dawn
go trailing by,
Grey mists and mocking winds ;
And sullen brooding twilights break in rain on
rain,
To lash the ragged blinds.

The slow, sun-dappled clouds lean down o'er
waters blue,
Clear mirrored one by one ;
Then drift as all the world shall drift. The very
stars
Their timeless courses run.

How many autumn moons have steeped those
palace walls !
And paled the shattered beams !
What is their royal builder now ? A Lord of
dust ?
An Emperor of dreams ?

WANG WEI

A.D. 699-759

A CELEBRATED poet and doctor who served two masters, the Emperor Ming Huang and the rebel general An Lu-Shan, and was eventually appointed governor of a province by the Emperor Su-tsung. It is recorded of An Lu-Shan that he once asked him what kind of animal a poet was, and what purpose he served. Wang Wei shortly afterwards had his revenge when, called upon to sing at a rebel banquet, he improvised verses in honour of his former patron Ming Huang.

WHILE ROSES FALL

Dawn after dawn the last doth nearer bring.
Ah ! what avails the shy return of spring ?
Then fill the wine-cup of to-day and let
Night and the roses fall, while we forget.

LI PO

A.D. 706-765

THE greatest of all the Chinese lyrists, Li Po was a child of Nature and subject like her to infinite moods. He may perhaps be called a pessimist, but not in the sense that we call Schopenhauer and his school pessimists. His was a pessimism of contrasts ; the brighter the day, the darker the shadow. His fault, if so exquisite a lyricist may be said to possess one, was that he never looked beyond a single cycle. With him, the spring arrives, he sees summer lengthen into autumn, and autumn fall before winter ; but there, for him, the cycle ends. There is no return of spring. Like so many of his great contemporaries, Tu Fu, Meng Hao Jan, and others, he bends low to catch a whisper of the past, some voice murmuring as in a dream from moonlit ruins foreboding the common lot of all.

It has been said of him that he had no cure for sorrow but the forgetfulness that lurks in the wine-cup. This is only true in part. When the littleness of man came into hopeless conflict with the vastness of destiny, there was but one way of escape for the poets and philosophers of China. It is called "the Return to Harmony" ; it consists in identifying oneself with Nature. Chuang Tzu, the philosopher, knew this ; Li Po, the poet, felt it ; and here is the conclusion —the futility of the wine-cup and the call of great rivers :

In vain we cleave the torrent's thread with steel ;
In vain we drink to drown the grief we feel.
When man's desire with fate doth war, this, this avails alone,
To hoist the sail and let the gale and the waters bear us on.

So the poet, out of harmony with inexorable law, lets soul and body drift with the natural movements of the wind and the waves. Discord is silenced in the primitive music of the world.

ALONG THE STREAM

The rustling nightfall strews my gown with roses,
And wine-flushed petals bring forgetfulness
Of shadow after shadow striding past.
I arise with the stars exultantly and follow
The sweep of the moon along the hushing stream,
Where no birds wake ; only the far-drawn sigh
Of wary voices whispering farewell.

THE PALACE OF CHAO-YANG

No more the peach-tree droops beneath the snow ;
Spring draws her breath the willow boughs
among.
The mango-bird now maddens into song,
And the swift-building swallows come and go.
'Tis the time of the long daydreams, when laughing
maybeams,
On the mats of slothful revellers play ;
'Tis the time of glancing wings, and the dancing
Of moon-moths whirling the hours away ;
When the golden armoured guardians are withdrawn,
And pleasure haunts the rustling woods till dawn.

A warm and perfumed wind
Strays through the palace blind
And wandering prys into some dim retreat
Where every whisper stirs the heart to beat.
Now all the gay parterres
Are rivals for the sun
That drains their jewelled goblets one by one
From dimpled terrace and green dewy stairs.
And the water-lily renders to the spring
The wonder of her white unbosoming.
Far away in the tall woods there is an oriole
calling ;
There are shadows in the blue pavilion of dancers,
and music rising and falling,
In the month of peach-bloom and plum-bloom,
in the silken-screened recess
Love is the burden of sweet voices, and the brief
night melting, and the long caress.

THE TWO VISITS

Visit to the Cold Clear Spring

Ah ! when the darkness blinds the orb of day
This cold clear spring chatters my grief away,
And, as the current whirls along,
She lilts a little wordless song ;
This little wizard, clear and cold,
Echoes the thoughts I left untold,
And for music I have the sound
Of the tall pines surging round.

Visit to the White Stream Rapids

I crossed the White Stream at its slender source
When Dawn first cleft the tangle of the stars
And shook the darkness from her. And I saw,
Passing a while from the worn tracks of men,
Islands innumerable environèd
In Nature's colours gold and green. The sky
Laid the blue mirror of eternity
Upon the shining waters. One by one
The clouds sailed out to sea. My random thoughts
Went wandering where monsters silver-mailed
Flash down their native streams. I sang the songs
That swelled with noon and faltered with the dusk
And failed in the twilight. Then I sought the
gleam
Of cottage eaves amid the moonlit fields.

SPRING RHAPSODIES

I. Delight

Once more Heaven bids the plough-star drive
before the spring, and turn its handle to the
east,

Spring—the blue harmonies of tumultuous waters!
The fair fragrance of orchid sprays.

Climb and look out and beyond. At once the eye
retains the whole immeasurable expanse of
the sea, and the slenderest film of the clouds.

The soul streams out in ecstasy.

Tears! my tears are falling.

Of the gentle pure breeze I sing—of the waves
of Chang-lang are my songs

Of lake Duntkhin are my dreams, and my sighs
for the river-lands of Oyas and Oyan.

What a lightness of health is in my soul! One
with the spring-wafting of the wind, it soars
away and flies I know not where. Yes! it
soars, but whither I know not. And my
thoughts are boundless.

I am whelmed in a dream of this fairest of seasons,
in a mood that dispels not.

The whole plain heaves into bloom—what flowers!
what sceneries!

Ah! fragrance of sweet herbs, my love and grief
are for you.

Sorrow, a sharp-edged knife, is sheathed in my
heart,

For these are the last of spring—the ending of
spring's last days.

Sadness of heart takes hold of me, and no light
weariness.

Away my thoughts ! By the winding Khang, by
the roaring rapids of Syan my plunging
hands are hidden with fairy flowers—and
still my thoughts have mastered me. . . .

Each year this picture is the same. Spring comes
—the flowers bloom. But lo, there is an
end of them—and change comes over spring.

Swiftly, swiftly the long river speeds away its
waters.

I follow with my gaze the flowing waves and in
thought

I pass with them to the east, to the very sea.

Alas ! 'tis even so with spring—it stays not with
us once its time has come.

Soon, too soon will Destiny send forth the breath
of tottering age.

Ah ! that I cannot fling a long, long rope over the
blue sky and bind with it the white orb of
light as it rushes on to its setting !

II. Sadness

The east wind has returned. The green of the grass renews and I know that spring is here. Streams unbound awake into the dance of life. Softly the weeping willow waves its long slim boughs.

What sorrow is there in its movement !

Light of the sky, most fair, most tender blue ! Air of the sea, sweet-scented, fresh, green-tinged ! Bright colours on the emerald, dreaming off into the distance in a half-seen veil—such was the earth.

The little clouds hover lightly in the heights, each melting into the more radiant beyond.

Headlong waters are gathered in headlong streams. My glance falls on the moss by the river-bend. How delicate and swift its movements in the wind !

Gauze of the wandering threads whirled here and there, my spirit is minded to escape and whirl along with you.

O air and light ! I am drunk with you ! I am dazed—and I am plunged in sorrow.

One who has hearkened to the waters roaring down from the heights of Lung, and faint voices from the land of Ch'in ; one who has listened to the cries of monkeys on the shores

of the Yang-tse-Kiang, and the songs of the land of Pa ; that renowned beauty Wang Chao-Chün, who saw before her the last jasper gate of her native land ; that renowned Ch'u poet singing the glories of the tinted maple wood—ah ! these knew sorrow.

And if I ascend, and, mindful of them, look out across the blue horizon, I feel the keen pang of grief that, piercing through me, finds my heart.

The soul of man swells like a wave at the coming of spring.

But there is also the sadness of spring-time, which, like falling snow, distracts us.

Both sorrow and joy throbbing and pulsing—a countless crowd of feelings are stirred and mingle together in this festival of perfume.

What if I have a friend far away on the shores of the Hsiang ! Clouds part us and hide us from each other.

Upon a little wave I shed the tears of separation, and—little wave going eastward, take to my friend my soul-felt love.

Oh ! that I could grasp this golden light of spring, keep it and horde it—a treasure-trove of days for my fairest far-off friend.

6.6.25

III. Sorrow

Dawn reddens in the wake of night ; but the days
of our life return not.

Sweet-scented orchids blot out the path ; but
they die in the drift of waters and their
flowers are blotted out.

The Yang-tse-Kiang splashes through shelving
maple-woods.

The eye contains a far horizon, but the wound of
spring lies deep in the heart.

O Poet ! turn thee to the Capital—to the men
who shall make thee forget.

Surely, the Earth-sorrow for the passing of spring
from her quiet places is overwhelming.

BRIGHT AUTUMNTIDE

I climb the mountain of Tsyu-i. I look down on
clear rivers.

Coldly the Syan speeds along, cold as it widens
to meet the sea.

Clouds break into autumn tints, the skies are
flaked with golden foam.

I am now in the foreign regions of Tsin and U ;
and countless are the miles of the trackless
way, brushed by the wings of birds alone,
lying between me and my native land.

Now with its half-disk leaning upon some island
sets the evening sun.

The lake is beginning to glow. There soars the
moon from the rim of the far-off sea.

And all my thoughts are plunged into the hardy
loveliness of autumntide.

Northward I wander in dream to Yan, southward
I search for Yuye. . . .

The lotus is falling, falling. The river is jewelled
with autumn hues.

Long, long the wind blows. . . . Long, long the
night wears !

Fain would I grasp the incredible. . . .

Oh ! to fly away seaward and dream for a little
by its shores ! . . .

To take from an island in blue ocean the six
monsters—

Alas, there is no such length of line.
My hand caresses the surging wind ; I am deeper
drowned in sorrow.
I will away ! away ! Too strong is the life of
men for me.
There in the magical land of P'eng-lai I will
gather the grass of immortality.

TU FU

A.D. 712-770

NEXT to Li Po in the estimation of his countrymen stands Tu Fu. His poetry is more finished in style than that of any Chinese master of the T'ang period. Like many other poets of his age, he was also a painter and a friend of painters, notably of the soldier-artist Kiang-Tu. The wonderful horses of Kiang-Tu's brush have long vanished, but Tu Fu's poem remains and is worth quoting:

The two horses are the envy of all sportsmen.
They have the appearance of war-chargers,
Which can hurl themselves, one against a thousand.
Their white hair throws itself into the wind and dust.
The others, quite as wonderful, resemble
Now a cloud, now snow whirling in space,
Their delicate legs seem to run alongside the pine forest,
Whilst the spectators who see them pass applaud.

In common with most Chinese poets, Tu Fu had that haunting sense of sadness and regret for days gone by which the Portuguese call *saudades*—a word which has no equivalent in the English language. The reason is to be found in Chinese character and history. Already in Tu Fu's time the Empire had grown old and venerable. Dynasties had risen and set, cities and palaces had shrunk into grass-grown mounds. And to the Chinese the past has always been a cult—almost a religion. They realise the profound truth, more

than any other nation, that no man can escape from his ancestors, though he flee to the uttermost parts of the earth. Ancestral voices are calling him. Fears, hopes, and passions long forgotten still struggle for existence within him. By bell, book, and candle you may exorcise all ghosts, but the men and women of your race—these are the ghosts that are never laid.

IN EXILE

Through the green blinds that shelter me
 Two butterflies at play—
 Four wings of flame whirl joyously
 Around me and away ;
 While swallows breasting to the shore
 Ripple the waves they wander o'er.
 And I that scan the distant view
 Of torn white clouds and mountains blue
 Lift to the north my aching eyes ;
 'Tis there—'tis there the city lies !
 Chang-an arise ! arise !

THE GHOST-ROAD

The winds and the pines are whispering,
 The river girds in its flight,
 My footfalls sound through ancient tiles
 Where grey rats flit from sight.

What monarch raised those palace walls ?
 Who knows to-day his name
 Who left beneath yon precipice
 The stone wrack of his fame ?

Like jets of dusky blue I see
 Ghosts from the gloom arise,
 Down the forgotten road return
 Strange rumours and faint sighs.

The thousand voices of the void
 Blend to a chant bizarre,
 And the purple leaves are carpeted
 For Autumn's avatar.

The death-doomed legions thunder past
 In the wake of fleeting years ;
 I fain would drown their tramp with song,
 But all my songs are tears.

SAILING ACROSS LAKE MEI-PEI

Tsen-tsang and his brother delighted to dream in
 grand horizons,
 They drew me down to the water's edge, their
 fellow wanderer.
 Veiled was the sky and sombre the land, and
 sudden the change from daylight,
 The wind rose and the storm-waves seemed to be
 rolling pale gems in the foam.

Our boat shot forth from its moorings and rippled
 into the movement,
 Great was the scene, inspiring to song, but the
 dominant note was fear.

How should I not be stirred with danger surging
around me ?

Treacherous wind and crested wave, is there no
escaping you ?

Lo now the captain unfurls the silken sail to the
breezes

And the boatmen begin to rejoice as the last cloud
flags away.

The wild-fowl rise with a roaring of wings, scared
by the chant of oarsmen ;

Lute and flute are astir ; faint harmonies drip
from the sky.

Bright are the water-lily's leaves as though the
rains had burnished them.

The slack line slips through my hands that would
fathom the soundless lake.

My gaze falls on the vast expanse of the limitless
void before me,

Rearward menacing, dark, Chong-Nan towers out
of sight.

Southward the mountains brood above the restless
waters,

Their grim reflections, trembling, sink in deeps of
darkening blue.

The sun sets, the boat glides by the cloud-
pavilioned pagoda,

And soon the moon is mirrored in the dun dusk of
the lake.

'Tis then the black dragon, breathing pearls, looms
out of the darkness.
'Tis then the river-god beats the drum, and the
shoaling monsters rise.
The naiads leave their dim retreats, faintly their
revels find us,
And the pale streamers of their quickened lutes
gleam for an instant far away.

CH'ANG CH'IEN

CIRCA A.D. 720

THE story of the beautiful Chao-Chün is a favourite theme of Chinese poets and ballad-mongers. The Emperor Kaotsu, the founder of the glorious Han dynasty, made a treaty with a certain Prince of the Huns, who as a pledge of its fulfilment demanded the hand of "a flower from the palace of the Hans." Kaotsu sent a messenger to the capital with orders that all the girls in the palace apartments awaiting a summons from the Emperor should have their portraits painted. When this was done he chose from the number the dullest and most insipid, and commanded the original to be brought into his presence before sending her to the Prince. The astonished Court then beheld a girl whose beauty enchanted all eyes, a vision of loveliness unsurpassed. But the Emperor's word was final, and Chao-Chün crossed the border to her lifelong exile. The Emperor wreaked his vengeance on the faithless painter whose lying portrait was the cause of her sacrifice, but her lost charms obsessed him, and he could never forget. Vainly the caravan of a hundred camels, laden with gold, the ransom for an Empress, set out for the country of the Huns. Their Prince refused all offers for her while she lived, and when she died even the last honour of burial in her native land was rejected.

THE TOMB OF CHAO-CHÜN

Death would have ravished her some hapless day
Even among the palaces of Han,
But she was never born to taste
The bitterness of fate so far away—
This pearl of beauty for whose sake did haste
The camels' golden-gleaming caravan.
To-day but dust and bones remain
Of her whose ransom threaded the cold steppes in
vain.

Night fell on chariots to the frontier ranged,
But horses champed, for none were fain to part.
Each cursed the lying hand, the traitor's heart.
The moon surprised us scattered round the tomb,
And all our tears were changed
To little piteous lights that ringed the gloom.

TS'UI HAO

A.D. 703-755

BOATING SONG OF THE YO EH

O LIGHT we glide through forest green,
By misty shore and gaunt ravine.

And whether we tarry or drift along
The clouds and the birds around us throng,
And mirrored mountains' nodding brows
Follow the wake of our flying prows.

Now song returns from rock to rock ;
Now soundless glades our silence mock.

Sunbeam and shadow elves at play
Beckon our wandering wills to stray.
Ah furl your sails ! ah furl your sails !
The last wind down the valley fails.

HAN YÜ

A.D. 768-824

ONE of the wittiest and most brilliant of the T'ang statesmen and philosophers, Han Yü's poetry has been overshadowed by his prose essays, which have been upheld as models of Chinese literature. He attempted to found a new school of Confucianism, being a bitter opponent of the Buddhist tendencies of his day, and was banished to a semi-barbarous region which he set to work to civilise. Su Tung-p'o, the great Sung poet, wrote a magnificent poem to his memory which has been translated by Professor Giles (cf. *Chinese Literature*, p. 161).

DISAPPOINTMENT

Still moonlight floods the inner gallery,
Where the japonica sets fluttering
Her silvered petals. Languidly
I rise, and let my absent glance
Fall where the shadows of the swing
Over the door-step dance.

I am possessed
By spring's rough humid winds that penetrate
The silken curtains of my lonely state,
And cannot rest,

For all my sorrow.

During the night I hear the heavy rain

Crash on the lotus pool afar.

To-morrow ! ah to-morrow !

The little boat lies swamped that I would fain
Have steered in search of the golden nenuphar.

PO CHÜ-I

A.D. 772-846

ONE of the greatest statesmen that China has produced. Po Chü-i comes nearer to our idea of a poet of the Romantic School than most Chinese writers. Yet even when he tells the story of the Emperor Ming Huang and the Lady Yang Kwei-fei—the one supreme love romance of China—he deals with issues that endure beyond the curtain-fall on tragedy. For him the final crisis is never attained. A wrong done has results beyond the reach of time. For a fuller account of this poet cf. *A Lute of Jade*, p. 73.

IN YUNG-YANG

I was a child in Yung-yang,
A little child I waved farewell.
After long years again I dwell
In world-forgotten Yung-yang.
Yet I recall my play-time,
And in my dreams I see
The little ghosts of May-time
Waving farewell to me.

My father's house in Yung-yang
Has fallen upon evil days.
No kinsmen o'er the crooked ways
Hail me as once in Yung-yang.

No longer stands the old Moot-hall,
Gone is the market from the town ;
The very hills have tumbled down
And stoned the valleys in their fall.

Only the waters of the Ch'in and Wei
Roll green and changeless as in days gone by.

Yet I recall my play-time,
And in my dreams I see
The little ghosts of May-time
Waving farewell to me.

RAIN AT DAWN

At dawn the crickets shrill, then cease their 'plain,
The dying candle flickers through my eaves ;
Though windows bar the wild dust and the rain,
I hear the drip, drip, dripping on the broad
banana leaves.

MYSELF

What of myself ?

I am like unto the sere chrysanthemum
That is shorn by the frost-blade, and, torn from its
roots,

Whirled away on the wind.

Once in the valleys of Ch'in and Yung I rambled
at will,

Now ring me round the unfriendly plains of the
wild folk of Pa.

O galloping dawns with Youth and Ambition
riding knee to knee !

Ride on, Youth, with the galloping dawns and
dappled days !

I am unhorsed, outventured—

I, who crouch by the crumbling embers, old, and
grey, and alone.

One great hour of noon with the sky-faring Rukh
I clanged on the golden dome of Heaven.

Now in the long dusk of adversity

I have found my palace of contentment my dream
pavilion ;

Even the tiny twig of the little humble wren.

MORNING STUDIES

Smooth and white the walls that ring the pool,
Carefully swept the rose-walk's mossy green,
Across the water dimpling winds blow cool
Where lotus-leaves as large as fans are seen.
What does yon flower-bright pavilion hold ?
Simply a lute and there a song encrolled.
To the sound of dropping pearls I turn the leaves,
Playing, swaying beneath the spell the soul of
Autumn weaves.
Thus quietly the morning studies end,
And so I wait my friend.

THE LITTLE CROW

The little lonely crow
Hovered around a little empty nest,
Waiting and wailing for the mother breast.
Ah ! cold and far afield she cannot hear
The call incredulous of death. And so
It lurked in the old forest for a year.
And through the night its little piteous cry
Brought tears to all who wandered nigh ;
As though in broken song it would repay
The debt of life to her who silent lay.
All other nestlings know a mother's care ;
Thou, only thou shalt find not anywhere,
Nor warm dark wings fold down on thy despair.

AT FORTY-ONE

The waters from the pool are vanishing ;
A mellow sunlight steeps the window-panes,
And autumn winds ply many a pleasant fan.

O gold and green, half-ripe, the acacias glow,
While o'er the threshold of his summer falls
The shadow of a solitary man.

A NIGHT ON LAKE T'AI

Water and sky, as dusk folds down, together blend
in a grey green mist

Clear silhouettes of the trees are limned on a
sunset of rose and amethyst.

Moon doth creep from the bed of the deep paling
the storm-black waves afar ;

Through frosted rushes ripe oranges are gleaming
golden star on star.

I am void of cares and affairs, so happily drink
and dream in peace.

Loud and shrill may the reed-pipes trill ; when
they touch my heart they cease.

But my ten little painted ships to-night, where
shall they anchored lie ?

At the foot of the Tung-t'ing mountain, on the
cold deep breast of lake T'ai,

OU-YANG HSIU

A.D. 1007-1072

OU-YANG HSIU, Chief Minister of State 1061 A.D., was one of the two foremost poets of the Sung dynasty. His poems, which have been all too little translated, are remarkable both for their exquisite imagery and colouring. Together with Sung Ch'i, he produced the history of the T'ang period. Cf. *A Lute of Jade*, p. 111.

RETURN

You far away—you know
That when the wine-cup reddens o'er the lake
I call to you a thousand leagues apart,
From the sheer confines of the world, and lo,
All golden for your sake,
Spring dimples through the doorway of my heart.

THE PAVILION OF ABOUNDING JOY

Red trees, green hills in the sunset, and steppes of boundless grass.

O little the pilgrim reckons of the Spring about to pass.

In front of the Joy Pavilion, in the drift of scented showers

To and fro I come and go on a carpet of fallen flowers.

WILD GEESE

When wild geese leave the uplands lone
The frost turns sand and rock to stone.

When over Chiang Nan they scream
Pale leaves go drifting down the stream.

Broad is the water ; heaven leans low ;
Sullen and dun the cloud-wracks show.

When north winds tear the ragged sky
Their taper files go whistling by.

BELL HILL

In the ravine the water wanders through ;
Soundless it laps the stems of tall bamboo.
Westward a tiny strip of green all scrolled
With fairy pennons flaunting, red and gold.

Oh rare ! Oh delicate is spring !
Thatched roofs face one another. All day long
Silent I dream. No bird breaks into song,
The very hills are slumbering.

SONGS OF THE NIGHT

I

In flowing crowds
 The moon-born clouds
 Cast their light shade
 O'er stairs of jade ;
 And all the moonlit ways are one,
 Shining in silver unison.
 Yet who can read aright
 The mystery of night ?

II

Spring-time, and sounds of the streaming water-
 fall ;
 Deep night, on shrunken hill-tops spreads her pall.
 The moon steers through a maze of pines, and lo,
 A thousand thrusting peaks are set aglow.

III

In the cold water the collected snow
 Melts, and the frozen stream begins to flow.
 The laughing girls slip homeward through the dark,
 While sand-birds wheel around the fisher's barque.

WANG AN-SHIH

A.D. 1021-1086

SOCIAL reformer, politician, and literary man, Wang An-Shih has often been called the Father of Chinese Socialism. For many years he enjoyed supreme power as Prime Minister of the Emperor Shen Tsung, during whose reign he introduced a system of state doles to agriculturalists and organised a universal militia for safeguarding the country. He lived long enough to see the whole of his legislation repealed by his successor and rival Ssü-ma Kuang, the historian.

AT THE PARTING WAYS

The west wind ruffles the water
Where the last red blossoms fade,
And the thought of separation
Is stirred by the lute's serenade.
East of the world-piled hills
Our song of parting thrills.

SU TUNG-P'0

A.D. 1036-1101

TOGETHER with Ou-Yang Hsiu, Su Tung-p'o ranks as the foremost poet of his age. His whole career is curiously similar to that of the older poet. Both were statesmen, and both suffered on account of their uprightness and independence at a time when morality in public life counted for little. Su Tung-p'o, after holding high office, was ultimately banished to the island of Hainan, where he held the obscure post of sub-prefect. Here many of his best poems were written in lonely exile.

DREAMING AT GOLDEN HILL

The stranger merchants faring from the east
Muffled in cotton robes, have met to feast.
They drink, they revel, and they part at will,
While moonlight floods the towers of Golden Hill.
The third watch comes, the tide begins to flow ;
A fair wind follows, and in dreams I blow
The reed-pipes, and have sailed to far Yangchow.

AT THE KUANG-LI PAVILION

Red-skirted ladies, robed for fairyland, all have flown,
But my heart to the wail of their long reed-pipes lifts on :
Their clarion songs 'mid the wandering clouds were blown,
The tiny-waisted, dreamily-dancing girls are gone.

FAREWELL TO CHAO TÂ-LIN

Long do I sorrow that the spring should end ;
Fain is the host to stay the parting friend.
When for a while the dull routine is done,
We statesmen idle in the sun.
The kettle yields its stream of golden tea,
And warm winds spread the odours of congee.
Finished the cup, faded the crimson peach,
Twilight, the green embankment levelled to the beach,
My boat is poled along the shore and soon
In the pure night unlanterned we recline ;
Until, caps off to conquering wine,
We nod, the dream companions of the moon.

ON THE RIVER AT HUI-CH'UNG

Beyond the twilight grove some sprays
Of peach-bloom charm the lingering days.
In spring, when first the waters warm,
The wild duck on the river swarm.
When artemisia lights the land
Young reeds break through the dappled sand.

LIU TZU-HUI

CIRCA A.D. 1100

LISTENING TO THE HARP

NIGHT and the midway moon. Some hidden
lute

Sounds from a silken alcove. As the wind
Swell^s and recedes the lutany now swells,
Now falters. Now commingled with the clouds
It throbs betwixt the earth and moon. Almost
Like gentle mockery the echoes fall
As laughter breaks on tears. The hand that
sways

The crowded chords I see not, but the heart
Made visible by music far away
 Spells me her dreams. Ah ! mourns she not the
tryst

New made and newly broken, but the old
Lost love of long ago. Her melodies
Are secret sorrows welling through the lute—
Are captive nightingales escaped in song.

One touch of the chords, and snow-flakes scatter
round

One, and the flowing brightness of the sun
Passes. Perchance she grieves that few may hear
And understand. The floating dust collects
Beneath her silver nail-tips. Lone is she
As orphan phoenix calling, with whose plaint
The songs of all birds fail to harmonise.

AUTUMN MOONLIGHT

Not yet has the cool moon topped the hill.
White are the floating clouds that fill
Half heaven's void ; while to and fro
By the verandah windows go
My halting steps that pause as though
Stilled for the sound of one I love.

The flying brightness shimmers through the grove,
And, mirrored on the pine-ringed pool,
Makes her dream-waters beautiful.

Now Autumn's purest alchemy anew
Quickens the moonlight and distils the dew,
And silence, coiled more closely round my walls,
Strangles each tiny rumour that befalls.

WEN T'UNG

CIRCA A.D. 1100

MORNING

SUNBEAMS through twinkling pinewoods cast
Their shadows on my window screen.
A night of clouds and rain is past
And, newly blue and freshly green,
The Dawn rebuilds my world at last.
Pear-tree and plum-tree shed their burden sweet,
And children's happy voices rouse the street.

EVENING

Now pale flocks glimmer as they wind along ;
Into the deep ravine the herd goes down ;
The cold dumb pool awaits the nightly throng
Of wild geese wailing through the twilight brown.
With jars of new-made wine old farmer Wang
Gladdens the neighbours. Gloomy faces shine
And dark robes kindle to the flush of wine.

LU YU

A.D. 1125-1210

A DISTINGUISHED official who also made a name for himself as poet and historian.

SONG OF THREE GORGES

From the twelve Hills of the Witches I see the
Nine Peaks rise ;
Beyond my prows a myriad tints flush autumn's
empty skies.
Untrue the legend, " Morning clouds, and evening
rain,"
The howling of gibbons in bright moonlight fills
the plain.
When long June days begin
I wander to Nan-pin,
And moor my boat to a little quay
Where monkeys swing from tree to tree.
Now shadows gloom Ch'u Yüan's grey memorial ;
And by the tomb of Yü red roses fall.

LIU CH'ANG

CIRCA A.D. 1150

AUTUMN THOUGHTS

MOONLIGHT ! the floating mists are gone, a wind
unveils the deep clear night.
Star rivals star, and the silver river draws to her
breast the dreamy light.
Gaunt old trees cast shadows on the plain ;
Little birds hushed by fear are stirring, singing
again,
And my heart is a tumult of song
And a torrent of wild wings shaking free.
Home, home, home—I hear the long
Shrill of the far cicada calling me.

ON WAKING FROM SLEEP

At noon comes rest from the long routine ;
I launch my boat on the lilyed pond and float
Till I drift without will into sleep.
Green shadows lattice the waters green ;
Courtyard and house the silence keep.

Then a bird breaks over the mountain-side
And falls and calls from the crimson coronals
Of the woods that awake to her cry.
My silken robes in the wind float wide.
O wings of delight, draw nigh ! draw nigh !

ANON.

(From the Sung Collection)

RIDING BY MOONLIGHT

FROM the tall hill-top some great star
Falls to the west afar and afar.

Out of the glistening gorge below
The orient moon swims full and slow.

Hair dishevelled and sleeves blown wide,
Into the kind cool night I ride.

Faint winds free strange scents anew
Moon-paled maples bright with dew,

Dripping dreams from bough to bough
Sigh to my lute, Why sleepest thou ?

Hands on the waiting strings fall mute.
Low my heart answers—"I am the lute."

LIU CHI

A.D. 1311-1375

THE most celebrated of the poets belonging to the Mongol period, Liu Chi was also one of the foremost adherents of the rising dynasty of Ming, and eventually became Censor and Under-Secretary of State to the first Ming Emperor. The jealousy of rivals, however, pursued him, and in the end he was poisoned by his rival the Prime Minister, Hu Wei-yung. There is little depth in the poems of Liu Chi, but much charm and considerable feeling for natural beauty. A contemporary critic has described his poems as "wind-blown petals."

THE CONVENT OF SIANG-FU

So I sprang to horse at cockcrow all a fever to depart,
Galloped, galloped to the convent, ere the calling bells were still,
Over dimpled lawns a zephyr woke the lily's jewelled heart,
And the moon's faint crescent faltered down the cleft of wooded hill.

Oh the lonely little convent with its secret haunts
of prayer !

With its shadowed cells for dreaming, where
eternities abide.

Down the cedar-scented alley not a footfall stirred
the air,

But the monks' low droning echoed in the green
gloom far and wide.

NIGHT, SORROW, AND SONG

The rain's in the air
And the winds arouse,
Shaking the cinnamon boughs,
And the begonias' gay parterre ;
Raising dust and wreathing mist,
Whirling all things where they list—
Leaves in many-coloured showers,
Bright petals of innumerable flowers.
Knocking at all doors their hustling
Sets the silken curtains rustling,
Till, as shrunken draughts, they creep
Into the shrouded halls of sleep,
Raise the hair and ruck the skin
Of the startled folk therein.

I am grown weary of my lonely state,
Tired of the tongueless hours that wait,
Dreaming of her whom skies of blue
And twilight æons hid from view.

Swiftly the waters take their flight
Grandly the mountains rise,
Yon birds that taper to the skies
Why have they lost their plumage bright ?
Would they might bear my messages of love !
Alas ! the trackless heav'ns unroll above ;
From west to east the river flows,
But the waves return not to my calling ;
Once more the rare magnolia blows,
But hour by hour her flowers are falling.
My jasper lyre is laid apart,
Hushed for a while the lute of jade ;
I hear the beating of my heart,
And watch the moon lean down the glade.

Then, ere the shadows wane,
Out of the night's unrest
Ballad and old refrain
Lure me to seek again
The dream-built Isles of the Blest.

YANG CHI

CIRCA A.D. 1400

A NATIVE of the province of Kiang-su, Yang Chi became a district magistrate and afterwards secretary to the Minister of War, by whom he was sent into the province of Shansi as Treasurer-General to the Forces. He suffered the fate of so many Chinese officials, being impeached and falsely accused and finally condemned to life-long exile, during which the following suggestive little poem was written.

LINES WRITTEN IN EXILE

As pure as autumn water falls the dew ;
And cool of night is born when faintly sighs
The wind, that outcast of the twilight, dies,
And the green gloom of random grass anew
Covers the undulating shores. I see
Far out upon the lake an island gleaming
With a girdle of red nenuphar, and, dreaming,
I fill my sail o' dreams in search of thee.
Cold eyes of strangers follow me, and fears
Start with the trumpet from the ramparts blown.
And on my darkened robes are sown
Two pearls, my tears.

ANON.

CIRCA A.D. 1700

THE following two poems are anonymous, and belong to the Manchu period. They are but two of a series of flower studies endowing each flower with a fragrant personality of its own. The delicate beauty of the Chinese originals is almost impossible to reproduce.

PLUM BLOSSOM

One flower hath in itself the charms of two ;
Draw nearer and she breaks to wonders new.
An you might call her beauty of the rose,
She too is folded in a fleece of snows ;
An you might call her pale, she doth betray
The blush of dawn beneath the eye of day.
The lips of her the wine-cup hath caressed,
The form of her that from some vision blest
Starts with the rose of sleep all glowing bright
Through limbs that ranged the dreamlands of
the night.

The pencil falters and the song is naught,
Her beauty, like the sun, dispels my thought.

CALYCANTHUS FLOWER

Robed in pale yellow gown she leans apart,
Guarding her secret trust inviolate ;
With mouth that, scarce unclosed, but faintly
breathes
Its fragrance, like a tender grief remains
Half-told, half-treasured still. See how she
droops
From delicate stem ; while her close petals keep
Their shy demeanour. Think not that the fear
Of great cold winds can hinder her from bloom,
Who hides the rarest wonders of the spring
To vie with all the flowers of Chiang Nan.

YUAN MEI

A.D. 1715-1797

ONE of the happiest poets the world has known was born at Hangchow, the capital of the province of Chekiang, two hundred years ago. At an early age he was admitted to the college of Han-lin with the degree of doctor, and shortly afterwards sent to Chiang-nan as district magistrate. But the city of Nanking has the greatest claim upon his memory, for there he retired at the height of his career owing to a breakdown caused by overwork. There, on the outskirts of the city, he lived the life of a garden philosopher, a second Mr. Hsuan-wei. This garden became a shrine of literary pilgrimage frequented by the most talented men and women of the day.

Yuan Mei's genius was universal. He was by turn philosopher, historian, prose writer, and poet. A learned Frenchman, M. Imbault-Huart, discovered in an unfortunate moment that he had written a cooking manual and forthwith dubbed him the Brillat-Savarin of China. His manual is, in fact, a dainty trifle compounded of epicurean philosophies and served with *sauce piquante*. But Yuan Mei will live not by reason of his table, but for the sake of a garden made immortal beyond the Palace of the Moon, where the beloved of the goddess has followed the radiant children of his dreams.

A FEAST OF LANTERNS

In spring for sheer delight
I set the lanterns swinging through the trees,
Bright as the myriad argosies of night,
That ride the clouded billows of the sky.
Red dragons leap and plunge in gold and silver
seas,
And, O my garden gleaming cold and white,
Thou hast outshone the far faint moon on
high.

A MEDLEY OF PERFUME

Prone beside the western stream,
In the lilded dusk I dream ;
And mocking me the wind of spring
Such medley of perfume doth bring,
I cannot tell what fragrance blows,
Nor guess the lotus from the rose.

WILLOW FLOWERS

O willow flowers like flakes of snow,
Where do your wandering legions go ?
Little we care, and less we know !
Our ways are the ways of the wind ;
Our life in the whirl, and death in the drifts below.

ILLUSION

'Tis we that wail the hour of birth,
'Tis others weep the hour we die.
If I am sad, 'tis others sing ;
Should they lament, I will be feasting.
All flows, all passes, like yon stream ;
Like yonder wind-wheel all revolves.
We change the fire-drill, changing not the fire ;
New lamps or old, what matters it ?
'Tis laughable that all men flock in crowds
To worship Buddhas and the Genii ;
Austerities mean cramp and weariness,
And genuflections to the Rites a headache.
'Tis but a tangle of marsh-lights after all,
We cannot seize the shadow of the wind.
What if the gods made answer to our prayers ?
With shouts of laughter I should drive the crowd.

THE SECRET LAND

The flower fairies bring
Their playmate Spring,
But the Spring goes
And takes no rose.
She breaks all hearts
To incense and departs.

The river fain would keep
One cloud upon its breast
Of the twilight flocks that sweep
Like red flamingoes fading west,
Away, away,
To build beyond the day.

Give me the green gloom of a lofty tree,
Leaf and bough to shutter and bar
My dream of the world that ought to be
From the drifting ghosts of the things that
are.

Mine is a secret land where Spring
And sunset clouds cease wandering.

IN AN OLD LIBRARY

Ten thousand tomes with pendant discs of jade,
Bowls of old Shang with bronze of Chow dis-
played,
And suddenly the small
Tinkle of girdle gems floats through the hall,
As though the wind custodian sings :—
“I guard the fragrance of a thousand springs.
Draw near ! draw near !
Ten thousand yesterdays are gathered here.”

A CHALLENGE FROM THE MOON

The moon leans mirrored on the dark guitar,
 As though she fears its cadences unheard
 May lapse into the night. Oh ! I am stirred
 By some some rare tone afar
 Caught from the drifting Palaces of Cold,¹
 Where pale musicians through the moon-mists
 peer,
 And challenged into song. Of waters rolled
 Seaward I sing. Now clear
 Now muffled in the wreathèd haze, now fall
 My chords far strangled down the forest. All
 My cares are centred in the strings, and I forget
 That night and dawn on the long grey line have
 met.

AFTER THE RAIN

In the Pavilion of Green Purity
 The green of the circling lawns is mirrored anew.
 Across the crystal frontiers² that divide
 Are smiling flowers and raindrops glancing
 through.
 And lo, the strange blue void wells clear of the
 clouds
 Like a sky beyond a sky, with a blue beyond the
 blue.

¹ The great Cold Palaces of the Moon that drift here and there in the moon-mists, once visited in a dream by the Emperor Ming-huang.

² The window-panes.

HOME

Surely there sings no lighter heart than mine
beneath the sky !

And now, companion of my nights of long moon-
dreams, good-bye !

For mine is the silver dragon car

That hovers beyond the Rainbow Dome,¹

And it's oh to be galloping, galloping home
Where my dream-born children are !

¹ The palace where Chang O, the Moon-goddess, dwells.

NOTE

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L. C.-B.

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